

MINUTES OF MEETING OF FORESTRY BUSINESS UNITS STAFF COUNCIL THURSDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER 2005 - MES HEAD OFFICE STIRLING

Trade Union Side

A Gillies, GMB, TUS Vice Chair
J Brown, Prospect
A Stewart, Prospect, TUS Secretary
B Hamilton, PCS
E Williams, T&G

Management Side

Craig Heaney, Chairman
J Livingston, MES
D Killer, FCE
M Shearer, Secretary

Agenda Item 1: Introductions

C Heaney welcomed everyone to the meeting. Noting the number of apologies, disappointing, as the date for the meeting had been agreed a considerable time ago. He felt it was important that as the FBUSC only met twice each year a full attendance would be beneficial.

A Gillies advised that TUS representatives were today attending a Pay Meeting, hence the reduced numbers. He also advised that he was now undertaking the role of TUS Vice Chair and A Stewart remained as TUS Secretary.

Agenda Item 2: Apologies

Apologies received from D Taylor, E Shephard, R Beaney, R Laird, M Purvis and also N Russell.

Agenda Item 3: Minutes of 17 February 2005

The Minutes were agreed a true record.

Agenda Item 4: Matters Arising

One matter only, the Scope of the Audit of PMS had been copied to TUS.

DISCHARGED

Agenda Item 5: Business Briefing

C Heaney advised that he was currently working on BP06/07-08/09 to submit to Countries. The main challenge across the FBUs was POL which will run into future BP years. All other headers were on target. He and B Mahony had attended the EB in August and presented the FBU Annual Report, Outturn and Key Issues for current and future years. The FBU standing across the 3 Countries was very good and our specialist skills were much appreciated. BUs are now moving into Sustainability and become increasingly more involved in partnership working with FDs. Richard Earle was undertaking the Sustainability Project Officer role, covering items like biofuel, alternative

sources of energy, etc, etc. FBUs had recently contributed to FC England's response to Defra on sustainability. Again joint working partnership projects such as mountain bike tracks and trails, etc would be the areas where FBUs would become increasingly involved. FBUs were continuing to display best practice and best value from within across the 3 Countries. He mentioned that the Business Improvement Programme will also look at all functions to ensure best value is being achieved across the Commission in delivering Government policy. The challenge for FBUs is to move into the new agenda and adapt/change staff skills to suit. It is vital that core objectives continue to be met also. A Stewart queried how we would benchmark ourselves on sustainability issues. C Heaney advised that there are set Government and European targets, eg Business travel to reduce CO₂ emissions. Within FC we are able to demonstrate that we are meeting and exceeding these targets. J Livingston mentioned that environmental targets were contained within the BP reporting structure and would encompass energy, buildings, etc.

Agenda Item 6: Routing of External Trawls

B Hamilton advised that all FC Scotland recruitment/trawls are routed through Malcolm Crosby prior to issue and requested FBUs consider a similar approach. C Heaney stated he was happy to follow this practice and D Taylor would be advised to ensure that HR copied all trawls/recruitments for FBUs to B Hamilton in Peebles. It was important that this did not slow down the timescale involved in replacing/recruiting staff.

ACTION: Secretary

Agenda Item 7: Staff Development/Basic Learning Skills Programme and OU

B Hamilton requested an update on the take-up of the basic learning programme across BUs and the budget implications of this. C Heaney advised firstly that the training target for all BUs was 5 days per staff member per year and this had been exceeded in the last 2 years. He was unaware of anyone experiencing difficulties in receiving required training and asked TUS to ensure that if this was the case it was brought to the attention of the appropriate BU Head. M Shearer had issued Basic Learning Skills and OU packs to each FBU Cost Centre and FBUs had agreed that the subject would be discussed with staff individually via the PMS system. Due to the sensitivities of the training she would be unable to provide an update on uptake, with the necessary arrangements in place to allow requested learning skills to be addressed.

Succession Planning - FBUs had tackled this issue also via the PMS system. Director had in the last PMS round developed and issued an additional sheet to ascertain the aspirations of staff across the BUs and this had been taken forward by the development of an individual training/learning plan. Within FCE a Training Strategy is being drawn together which will list the relevant courses for each grade of staff. C Heaney believed it was beneficial for individuals and FC that staff move across the organisation to gain more depth

and wider experience. He advised of a change to the New Entrants Course to include a slot from FBUs at each New Entrant event. Also new leaflets outlining the skill from each area of the FBUs (FBU, FCE, MES, REB and PSS) had been printed and will shortly be issued to each member of FBU staff. J Livingston mentioned the commitment to apprentices within MES and that for the coming year 3 Modern Apprenticeships would be included in the budget and MES remains committed to having trainees at each workshop. He went on to say that the Vehicle Training which had been delivered by Eric Williams had been a definite success and that he would be looking to expand this into other areas over time as the opportunity arose. A Gillies stated that training and succession planning has been addressed across FBUs and C Heaney asked the TUS to actively promote training across all BUs, with a joint aim to have trainees in the majority of main FBU Cost Centres.

Agenda Item 8: PMS

A Gillies advised that the TUS were currently drafting a flyer to promote the current PMS system. TUS were keen to ensure staff viewed PMS as an aid to help them deliver and not seen as purely a management tool. C Heaney was pleased to hear of this TUS initiative and welcomed their input and assistance to the PMS system. M Shearer had contacted D Taylor and been advised that the review of PMS had been placed on the backburner for the time being. The draft report on the Audit of PMS was currently with Director HR and no update could be given prior to its issue. J Livingston and D Killer both welcomed the current PMS system as it makes individuals and managers discuss both the job and performance. Concluding, C Heaney advised he was happy to be consulted on the draft TUS flyer, prior to its issue to FBU staff and it was important for the Staff Council to openly and strongly support the existing system pending the review recommendations.

ACTION: TUS

Agenda Item 9: BU Updates

FCE: D Killer advised that staff numbers within FCE had increased to meet demand on other projects. Also operators who worked under contract in SW Scotland are to be taken on as employees. Last year's loss of business in Scotland was balanced by FCE moving into building windfarm roads and increasing its income pending the return to this year's road programme. Within England FCE are becoming more involved in non-SLA work, ie partnership working with FDs on externally funded projects, mainly of a social and environmental nature. In Wales additional income had come from last year's windfarm project and the Welsh Assembly have asked FCE to be involved in building roads for the next phase of this development. FCE need to continue to give value for money to Countries on SLA work by the best use of resources. To develop the initiative and achieve both these objectives, an existing member of FCE staff who is au fait with the skills available across all BUs has been identified. Initially development will be in England but will link with Scotland and Wales over time. Project management within Peebles also

requires to be enhanced and using existing FCE staff resources this too will be addressed.

A cascading skill register across FCE is also to be developed. All of these matters were supported by the FCEMB and now FBUSC had been advised on the strategy, prior to communication with staff. Querying the timescale for delivery, A Stewart was advised that the development work for England requires to be tackled quickly and should be well underway by December, with the enhanced Peebles role subject to the current recruitment at Kielder. C Heaney was keen to see FBUs involved in the available partnership working and the change to structure/responsibilities within FCE will address this. He advised the meeting of how costs to the Countries and inter-company charging worked. TUS were keen to see how this would be announced to staff and wished the matter to be discussed with TUS Secretary in Edinburgh prior to becoming public knowledge. They also were reassured to hear that this was not a new post that was being created, simply a re-arranging of duties to secure the additional work and income. D Killer agreed that he was happy to regularise this matter with E Shephard and would contact him after the meeting.

ACTION: D Killer

An additional challenge facing FCE for the coming year was to draw together within England a Forest Road Asset Condition Survey, which involved listing each road, what it was used for and taking a video of the current condition. FCE would also be undertaking joint training sessions with FD staff on OGB12. Advising that costs of contractors on the west coast of Scotland, who are now securing well paid work via windfarm development, had increased by 32% over the last year, J Brown felt that the costs in the west coast had been low to start with.

MES: J Livingston confirmed that the project to relocate Longman to a new workshop would not go ahead and that funds were now being used to upgrade the existing workshop. He was currently completing Country Business Plans and the dominant issues for MES were fuel price increases and increasing leasing costs. Leasing costs had been slightly contained, however, by negotiations with leasing companies. He was pleased to advise of the robust status of both REB and Chapelhall in the current submission, arising mainly from their diversification into other areas of work. Over the coming months MES will be looking to monitor fuel consumption of individual vehicles and also workshop heating costs. He concluded by advising that a Press Release on bio-diesel was about to be released and an interview with BBC's Landward would be aired on 30 October. Once the meeting had concluded he was heading off to the award ceremony for the Green Fleet Award and all wished him and MES well.

Agenda Item 10: Employee Survey 2005

E Williams advised that there had been an unsuccessful attempt to hold a LSC meeting in Wales. After discussion it was agreed that it was important

that both managers and TU representatives came together at LSC meetings and every attempt should be made to ensure these went ahead. It was appropriate for local issues to be discussed at local level; and hopefully resolved.

Regrettably, no Employee Survey report was available from MES Wales staff due to the low number of responses. Eric felt morale within Wales was still low and that uncertainty still existed in the Workshop. C Heaney felt the change and more positive position within FC Wales should be addressing this. After discussion it was agreed that the more upbeat position in FC Wales should be communicated to staff and that J Livingston, B Cochrane and TUS jointly make this happen.

C Heaney stated that overall the FBU response to the survey was pleasing, with many positive comments to build on, eg 'understanding team working contributes to the aims and objectives of the unit, skills in place to do the job'. From the available reports each BU Head will develop an action plan to be cascaded down to staff.

As TUS had not received copies of the BU survey reports it was agreed that M Shearer would advise HR Services that these would be issued to allow them to engage in discussions on this matter.

Across all FBUs C Heaney advised that Communication and Networking with others in FC were always areas which could be improved but that overall there was nothing too negative in the reports. Similar issues were reported by Heads of MES and FCE.

Craig Heaney concluded by stating the Employee Survey reports held many positive statements on items such as working together and working in my team. The developing action plan would ensure the maximum benefit from this important survey.

ACTION: FBU Heads/Secretary

Agenda Item 11: No Other Relevant Business

Agenda Item 12: Dates of Next Meetings

It was agreed the FBUSC would next meeting at:

1100 hours on 23 February 2006

1100 hours on 28 September 2006

All were asked to enter these dates into their diaries to ensure the meetings were well attended.